

Hummingbirds: habitat basics

Head and shoulders
Photo of DC or
Soil Conservationist
here

By _____,
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If you live in the eastern half of the United States, you may already have seen one of the most colorful visitors that can come to backyards and flower gardens. It's the ruby-throated hummingbird. Once you've heard their hovering hums or the high-pitched chirps of dueling birds, you'll not likely forget them.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds spend summers in a range from Minnesota to Texas to Florida to Maine, across the eastern United States. They have the widest breeding range of any hummingbird in North America, and play an important role in flower pollination of many species.

Their habitat needs are listed below, for people who live in the ruby-throated bird's breeding range. For those who do not, consider similar types of habitat for other hummingbirds.

Food preferences. Ruby throated hummingbirds feed during the day on nectar from wildflower blossoms and flowers of shrubs and vines. Included are flowers of jewelweed, columbine, trumpet creeper, beebalm, honeysuckles, lilies, phlox and others.

They draw nectar while hovering for the most part, but will feed while perched if possible.

Insects, including mosquitoes, gnats, fruit flies and small bees, also make up a large percentage

of the diet. They also eat birch tree sap, and spiders, caterpillars, aphids and insect eggs.

Nesting cover. Ruby-throated hummingbirds are primarily woodland birds. You'll find them in mixed woodlands, both deciduous and pine forests, and in woodland openings and at forest edges. They also visit gardens, orchards, yards, overgrown pastures, citrus groves, and fencerows. While their nectar and insect diet give the birds the water they need, you'll still find more ruby-throated hummingbirds in habitats near marsh and stream edges because they support more insect life. Nests are made of thistles, dandelions, and milkweeds, and the down of young leaves and ferns; they're mounted on tree limbs with spider webs. Oaks, maples, beech, poplar, pine, spruce and hackberry are common nesting trees.

Migratory habitat. The ruby-throated migrates thousands of miles each year to get a year-round source of nectar and insects; migratory habitat is similar to nesting habitat.

For more information, stop at our office at (Number) (Street) in (city) , or visit the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov. Or, visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov



Hummingbirds can taste the amount of sugar in solution. They prefer sweeter concentrates, like those possible in a sugar and water feeder.

Wildlife Ways Did you know....



Hummingbirds, the smallest birds in North America, are the only birds that can fly backwards. Their wings are adapted to helicopter-like flight-- a circular whirl that allows them to hover, move ahead, sideways or backward.